

A candid appeal to the freemen of Maryland on the projected removal of their seat of government.

CANDID APPEAL TO THE FREEMEN OF MARYLAND ON THE PROJECTED
REMOVAL OF THEIR SEAT OF GOVERNMENT.

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BY A FRIEND OF THE PEOPLE.

John Merc?r

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TO THE CITIZENS OF MARYLAND.

THE motion made in the House of Delegates at the last session for the removal of the seat of government, is an attempt fraught with consequences destructive to the happiness and liberty of the people of Maryland. It is a proposition which to me appears repugnant to justice and to true policy, and which is of too great importance to receive a decision without mature deliberation, and without the subject being brought fairly and fully before the people, in order that their opinions may be ascertained. It is a question which has been heretofore agitated, and which has been the sole cause of preventing the growth of Annapolis, and of effectually checking all spirit of enterprize in its citizens. To me there cannot be a more decisive proof of an illiberal soul, than the sport which has been recently made with the feelings of the Annapolitans. There are two points to be settled before the legislature can with propriety decide on the main question; first, whether the constitution will admit the projected change by the act of a single legislature; and secondly, whether the public good demands it. As each member of the legislature takes an oath to support

Library of Congress

the constitution, we must in candour suppose that none of them will consent to a plain violation of that instrument, even if they should be convinced that any act repugnant to its principles can have the force of a law. On the first of these questions I shall merely remark, that it is the decided opinion of gentlemen who hold stations of the highest eminence at the bar, that the seat of government cannot be removed without an alteration of the constitution. These opinions are sufficient for me, and any remarks of mine at this time appear to be unnecessary. Should however a discussion of this topic hereafter be required, it shall be cheerfully undertaken. If there be even a possibility that it was the design of the constitution to establish the seat of government at Annapolis, there it ought to remain, however great the inconveniencies might be, until the constitution was altered in the manner prescribed by its framers. The method of doing: this is by no means difficult, if the public good do really require it. This brings me to the second question proposed examination—some of the arguments which I shall use have been suggested by an address of Aristides to the citizens of Maryland, in the year 1786, the production of the late Chancellor Hanson, a name that will always be revered by those who knew and admired his many virtues, his finished urbanity, and his superior wisdom and knowledge. It is well known that the advantages of Annapolis induce? the 3 proprietary government there to fix its seat, and to procure for it a charter from the British throne, and that it continued to remain the seat of government after the revolution. What reasons now exist to take from it the government? Will it be the means of a saving to the state? I answer no. The state will sustain a loss in its revenue by sinking the value of the real property in Annapolis, and the public buildings would be worth nothing. Are the people of Maryland willing that the immense sums of money which have been laid out in building and repairing the public property shall be entirely lost, and new sums taken from their pockets to erect and provide buildings in the city of Baltimore? But it has been said that buildings will be prepared and offered for the reception of the legislature; this may be true, but I am satisfied that these buildings will never be erected and completed at the expense of a single city; let them obtain their object, and draw the legislature within their fangs, and they will find means to procure a reimbursement. It is also necessary for you to reflect,

Library of Congress

that if the seat of government be removed to Baltimore, other buildings will be wanting beside that in which the assembly may hold their sessions; apartments must be prepared for the executive, the treasurer, the register in chancery, and various other officers of government. It has been also said that the proposed measure will be attended with the happy effects of extending commerce, and concentrating the riches and force of the state, and that as all our power, wealth and grandeur, are to be derived from commerce, it is incumbent on us to do every thing for the encouragement of our first commercial city. I hope it will not be difficult to persuade you, that we ought and might have the advantage of the markets of several commercial towns; I mean towns where your produce might be purchased for exportation, and into which goods might be imported immediately from abroad. Had it not been for the repeated attempts to destroy it, Annapolis would before this time have become a place of this description. But every effort to advance its prosperity has been repressed by this cloud which has so long impended over it. The cruel apprehension that it might descend upon them, and sweep away all their hopes, has caused the abandonment of many a scheme which has been devised by the inhabitants for the amelioration of their condition. The massacre in Baltimore on the memorable 28th of July 1812, was the first circumstance that gave the people confidence in the permanency of the seat of government. The happy effects of this confidence were quickly perceptible, for immediately on the termination of the war which had been previously commenced, a number of buildings were erected by several of the citizens. 4 Amongst other improvements a large and commodious steam merchant mill has been established, and it is a fact worth mentioning, that the proprietor of this mill, a most enterprising and highly meritorious man, has frequently paid higher prices for wheat than could be obtained in Baltimore. Annapolis then does even now afford, to many of the farmers, an excellent market for their crops. This happy beginning affords the most favourable omen of what may hereafter be expected from the exertions of the inhabitants, if the legislature will extend to them their fostering hand, or if they will only reject the cruel proposition which has been submitted to them. Let it on the other hand be adopted, and the pleasing hopes of improvement, already so clearly manifested, will be nipped in the bud, and this lovely

Library of Congress

garden spot of our state be converted into a desert. It is the true policy of this state to afford the greatest encouragement to every rising town; a plurality of towns is always extremely beneficial, by affording a choice of markets, by stimulating the industry and enterprise of the merchants and mechanics, and by offering to the farmers and planters the strongest incitements to exertion. There can be no question, but that having access to several markets will greatly enhance the value of all the lands throughout the state. Can any man doubt that the prosperity of that section of the country which is connected with George-Town has been highly promoted by the rapid improvement of that flourishing and enterprising place? An ardent desire was generally felt to extend to other portions of the community advantages similar to those enjoyed by the favoured inhabitants, whose situation afforded opportunities of commercial intercourse with the District of Columbia, as well as with Baltimore. A canal was accordingly contemplated, and actually begun, to connect the Delaware with the Chesapeake bay. Had this scheme been carried into execution, most important advantages would have arisen to the planters and farmers on the waters of the Chesapeake, by affording an additional market for the sale of their produce. Nor would the benefit have been confined to them alone, for when the price of their produce was raised, as it necessarily must have been, the people of the interior counties would have enjoyed it in an equal degree. There are other considerations which operate in favour of this measure, extremely momentous, but as they might be regarded rather of a national than of a local nature they shall be merely glanced at. In the event of a war it would be necessary to preserve a free and uninterrupted communication from one end of the United States to the other. This object would be greatly facilitated by putting a canal to the Delaware from the Chesapeake, according to an act passed in 1799, as since the invention of steam batteries the entrance of both these bays might be effectually defended against line of battle ships and frigates; it is fit that this be done in time of peace, that whenever war comes the intercourse from north to south may be carried on without interruption, in despite of a superior enemy's fleet on the coast. This act was opposed, and has heretofore been defeated, by the low intrigues and cunning of the Baltimoreans; and imperiously as it is required by the general interest, it never will be carried into

Library of Congress

effect if they can procure that controul over the legislature which the contemplated removal of the seat of government must necessarily give them. And not only will they obstruct this improvement, so important to the agricultural interests, but they will even prevent if possible a single vessel from either loading or unloading at any other place in the state, unless under their direction. Indeed this they have already nearly accomplished; for it has long been obvious, that the narrow, selfish policy of Baltimore, deems the prosperity of all other places incompatible with its own, and would gladly crush them. TO this fact let the violent opposition made by this imperious city to the clearing of the Potomac bear witness. The deleterious consequences which must arise from the triumphant career of a spirit so detestable, must be apparent to every reflecting mind. If there be only one market to which you can send your commodities, is there not great danger that this market will be sometimes overstocked: in such a case the articles offered for sale must be either parted with at an under rate, or be stored for a more convenient season? Do you not recollect when the demand for *wheat* was confined to the single port of Baltimore, a common buyer, Mr.—, was appointed for all the millers? It appeared then that nobody wanted it but himself; and as there was no competition of purchasers the sellers were at his mercy. This specimen of Baltimore honesty deserves a place in your memory. I aver that these persons, who urge the removal of the seat of government to Baltimore, are not actuated, as they profess, by a desire to promote the interest of the farmer; a contracted self-love is their only motive, tho' while they seek the gratification of this feeling, they endeavour to inflame your imaginations by extravagant promises of personal aggrandizement, and by delusive professions of regard for the public good. Another reason in support of the removal much relied on by the deputation from Baltimore was, that if the seat of government was removed to that city more suitable persons would be selected for your representatives, and that so “*shabby a set*” as occupied the representative chamber at the late session “would not dare to shew their faces there.” This, it must be confessed, is an observation by no means flattering either to the delegates or to their constituents; and it is one which cannot be too highly resented by the freemen of the state. Can it be endured, that any man or set of men should presume to dictate to the independent

Library of Congress

yeomanry of our country to whom they shall confide the preservation of their liberties and rights? The spirit of every Marylander must revolt at the idea. Yet, that such a dictation would be exercised, is most certain, or, what amounts to the same thing, no man who might chance to be disagreeable to the cabal which would assume the management of your affairs, would be free from violent or contemptuous treatment. One other famous argument of this notable deputation remains to be noticed, though really it almost wears the appearance of burlesque. It is, that the representatives of the people cannot be accommodated with as soft beds, and as sumptuous dinners, in the plain and humble city of Annapolis, as in the splendid "emporium of the state." This I imagine is the first time that it was ever thought necessary, in order to qualify men for the business of legislation, that their faculties should be enfeebled by lolling on luxurious couches, or completely besotted by pampering the appetite with voluptuous repasts. The old republicans of Rome and Sparta would have listened with amazement to language like this. It was a maxim with them, that plain fare was most suitable to the simplicity and hardiness of freemen, and that every privation ought to be cheerfully submitted to, for the sake of the republic. Let it not however be supposed, that representatives who come to Annapolis are really obliged to live on *Lacedemonian broth*, or are debarred the enjoyment of any necessary or comfort of life. Last winter, it is true, some trifling inconveniencies might have been sustained; but this ground of complaint will never hereafter exist; for I venture to assert, that accommodations better in every respect can no where be obtained than are at this time afforded at Annapolis.

Having now replied to all the observations in support of the proposed measure which have hitherto been urged, I will proceed to state some objections to it, which appear to me entitled to your most serious consideration. It may with certainty be predicted, that when the seat of government shall be removed to Baltimore, there will be an end to all fairness and freedom of legislative discussion. It is a melancholy truth, that at the present day, whatever specious pretences may be made to public spirit, private interest is almost the universal principle. The merchants and other inhabitants will exert

Library of Congress

themselves to bring about those measures which will tend most to the advancement of their own supposed welfare, and the aggrandisement of their city. I will not say that the members will be bribed by excellent dinners, champaign, old madeira, or even a round sum in cash; but the effect of polite attention and insinuating address is well known, more especially when treacherous motives are not even suspected. If the directors of the south sea company could bribe men of immense wealth, the lord high treasurer of England, the earl of Sunderland, and Mr. Aislaby, the chancellor of the exchequer, and many members of parliament, in order to get laws passed favourable to them, how much more easy will it be for the *great monied men* of Baltimore to influence, by loans of money, the comparatively poor men who compose our legislature? If the seat of government be removed to Baltimore, the legislature could pass no law which the inhabitants should think themselves interested in defeating. At Annapolis an undue and improper influence has never been complained of; the reason is obvious, there is no one powerful order of men to combine for ruling the state. At Baltimore the case would be different; and if ever it obtain the seat of government you will find, that upon the arrival of your representatives at the commencement of every session, intriguing, crafty, designing men, will practise upon them those arts which seldom fail of success with the unsuspecting and inexperienced, and which have great power even over the most experienced and intelligent, with whom upon occasion other methods may be taken. Nothing can be more probable than that a majority of the house of delegates will be often gained by those arts to pass bills, under the plausible pretext of general good, when the advantage of a junto of Baltimoreans will be the real object. But suppose the senate to be superior to such arts, and preserve firmness sufficient to oppose the wishes of the junto, is it to be supposed that the persons concerned will quietly acquiesce in the opinions perhaps of only half a dozen men? If these few men persisted in opposing the wishes of a powerful party, and contrary to the wishes also of the more numerous branch of the legislature, their office would become odious, irksome and dangerous, and it would be impossible to execute it agreeably to the intentions of the constitution. The senate then, would lose all its dignity and authority; it would no longer serve as a check or counterpoise to the popular branch; the constitution

Library of Congress

would be no longer preserved, and no man is able to say what government would next prevail. Such, my fellow-citizens, are the mischiefs to be apprehended from the intrigues and overweening influence of the leading men. Let us now inquire whether less is to be apprehended from the populace.

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No man of reflection can expect that the deliberations of the legislature in a large city can be perfectly free without an armed force to protect them. Let us suppose, for argument 8 sake, a matter agitated in the assembly which rouses the passions of a mob, and about which popular clamours have been excited; let us suppose such a case as the enquiry into the cause of the riots which disgraced the city of Baltimore in the year 1812, or the act of the last legislature which annexed the precincts of Baltimore to that city. Can any man of common sense believe that the house of delegates could on such occasions have been at liberty to decide contrary to the opinion out of doors? Congress deemed it necessary to quit Philadelphia for the purpose of free deliberation, notwithstanding its doors were shut. If congress, conducting the affairs of the union only, having nothing to do with the internal government of Pennsylvania, and keeping as far as it could its deliberations secret from the world, found it expedient for the reasons I have suggested, to remove from Philadelphia, a city in general more remarkable for the orderly deportment of its inhabitants than almost any other on earth, surely a body of men, whose deliberations are public, cannot expect freedom of debate on matters immediately interesting to the inhabitants in such a place as Baltimore. It is well known, that in large and free capitals, the open deliberations of the legislature are liable to interruption from the populace. London and Dublin are examples; and when the French government was removed from Versailles to Paris, at the beginning of the French revolution, all freedom of debate was at an end; the king, and most of the members, were guillotined, and the government subverted by the persons who had the direction of the mob. In the United States the state governments of New York, South-Carolina and Pennsylvania, have all been removed from the great trading cities to places in the interior of the country, principally on account of

Library of Congress

greater personal safety and freedom of debate. The inhabitants of Baltimore are known not to be more orderly than those of other large cities; they are a motley crew; their mobs are composed of the outcasts from all the nations in Europe. The riotous character of Baltimore is well established throughout the United States; and yet it is astonishing, that the gentlemen deputed from that city to offer their *dancing rooms* for the accommodation of the legislature, should so soon have forgotten the terror *they themselves* were in, when they fled, affrighted and appalled, from butcher Mumma, and the *Septemberizers*, who committed the dreadful massacre at the gaol of Baltimore, as to endeavour to persuade the legislature to subject themselves to the danger and disgrace of being destroyed by an infuriated mob, whenever they should happen to displease the demagogues of Baltimore. It may be, that some of the principal inhabitants of Baltimore deem mobs very proper political engines; this is supposed from the conduct of many of them at the time of the massacre at the gaol. There will ever be found in great cities men, (no matter to what order they belong) who by courting and humouring the people, will render them subservient to their purposes, and through their instrumentality will endeavour to break down every constitutional barrier that is opposed to the gratification of their own wishes, and the aggrandizement of their power. If the people of Maryland intend that the deliberations of the legislature are to be protected by armed guards, continually maintained, and not unfrequently called into action, as in London, then indeed Baltimore might not be so unfit a place for the seat of government.

You will recollect that congress have frequently evinced their determination never to choose a large town for the place of their permanent residence; and the government of the United Provinces always chose the Hague for the seat of their government, in preference to the great commercial city of Amsterdam, because their deliberations were free, and the persons of the deputies to the states general safe in the former which they would not have been in the latter.

What can be the reason that induces the people of Baltimore so ardently to desire the seat or government, manifested by the deputation which they sent to Annapolis last winter; a

Library of Congress

mission which for cold-blooded cruelty and abject selfishness is almost without a parallel. Is it to teach the members *style*, which has ruined the peace and harmony of many a household in that city? Is it to initiate them into the arts of luxury and dissipation and the various ministers of vice whereby they may become bankrupt in fortune and character and beggar their families? or, is it that they may learn the art of *shaving* from the *shavers*, in order that they may be enabled, when they return to their homes, to cheat and defraud their neighbours? If at any time the people of Baltimore want any local regulations that are just and consistent with the public welfare, what is there to prevent them from laying their plans before the legislature at Annapolis? The truth is, that every thing there must undergo a full and fair discussion. The assembly has been ever prone to indulge the inhabitants of Baltimore in every thing that has had the least appearance of propriety. Indeed the fact is notorious, that even at this time the attention of the members is so much distracted by business of a private nature from Baltimore, that it is almost impossible for them to attend to the general welfare of the state. They are eternally pestered by the importunities of applicants for *bank director-ships*, *special acts of insolvency*, and releases from the *obligation of marriage vows*. Were the meetings 10 of the legislature held on the spot, this evil would be aggravated in a ten-fold degree; and it is scarcely hazarding too much to say, that freeing dishonest debtors, and faithless husbands from the most solemn engagements, would be their only business; except perhaps that the routine would be occasionally varied by appropriating large sums of money for the improvement of the imperial city, and by enacting game laws for the preservation of *imported Pheasants*.

I beseech you my fellow-citizens, to keep the seat of government where you are certain that the legislature may quietly and freely debate; where a mob cannot be raised to disturb or intimidate them; where the good of the whole will probably be consulted; where powerful combinations cannot be entered into against your freedom and rights; where the senate may retain its constitutional importance; where the genuine substance and not the mere forms of your constitution will be preserved. It has been said, that at Baltimore the members of the assembly may transact their private business whilst they are managing

Library of Congress

the affairs of the government. Would you, my friends, employ a man to manage your business, which requires the utmost diligence and attention, who at the same time is occupied by other engagements more interesting to himself? Does not every man know that to execute properly the duties of a legislator the closest application, the most intense study, and an entire exemption from all other business are absolutely necessary? Should Baltimore ever become the seat of government, then indeed your representatives will find other and more pleasant employment than that of attending to the public concerns. Independently of the time which would be devoted to the acquisition of wealth by speculation. Baltimore presents other attractions of a most dangerous nature. There vice in its most pleasing forms would be continually alluring your representatives from the path of duty; and in that large city there would be a certainty of avoiding exposure, which would afford the utmost latitude to men who felt disposed to gratify their pernicious passions at the expense of integrity and virtue. It would be painful, and perhaps indecorous to dwell longer on this subject; it is better to leave it to those reflections which the experience of every elector will suggest. The danger, however, was too glaring to be unobserved, and seemed too alarming to be entirely unnoticed. In Annapolis it cannot exist, or at all events must exist in a greatly inferior degree.

But even if these dangers were unworthy your attention, and the convenience only of the legislature were to be regarded. Annapolis would be in that case likewise an infinitely more eligible situation. Not only can the attendance of members be procured with greater facility while at the seat of government, 11 but it is also much easier for them to arrive there. I would appeal to any candid man, whether it be not more convenient for a majority of the state to repair to that city during the session of the legislature than to Baltimore. By your constitution the annual meeting takes place in December, and it seldom ends before February. At that time the city of Baltimore is usually inaccessible by water, and therefore the members and people of the eastern shore, in order to go to the government, or to return to their homes, would be always under the necessity of heading the bay.

Library of Congress

All observations concerning the wretchedness which will be occasioned to the citizens of Annapolis have been purposely omitted, because topics of a more general nature, and more immediately interesting to the great body of the people demanded attention. But this consideration, I am sure, will never be disregarded by a high-minded and generous people. The inhabitants of Annapolis have not, it is true, appeared as suppliants before you, conjuring you to spare their little all, to save their wives and children from beggary and ruin; but it is no less true, that beggary and ruin inevitably await them. They seem prepared, however, to be a silent and uncomplaining sacrifice; and I trust in Heaven they possess too much delicacy and elevation of sentiment to lead the air with repinings, or to endeavour to touch by lamentations any heart which is obdurate enough to regard their sufferings with indifference.

I am so far, my fellow citizens, from thinking a removal of the seat of government probable, that I see not the slightest cause for alarm if the subject be brought fairly before you prior to the election; because, to use the language of a great and good man who is now no more, I know that you “always mean right, and where time is allowed for reflection and information, will do right.” But there are strong reasons for believing that insidious, underhanded, and despicable means, will be resorted to by certain demagogues of Baltimore, for the purpose of accomplishing their object. “It has been said, and I in part believe it,” that certain of their minions in the different counties are to be selected to entrap the honest and unsuspecting yeomanry. A profound silence is to be observed with regard to this subject previously to the election, and immediately afterwards these emissaries are to be set industriously at work to obtain signatures to petitions for a removal of the government. Thus all enquiry is to be prevented, all animadversions silenced, and the sly and cunning machination is to be successfully prosecuted. Should the names of the persons concerned in this contemptible scheme be hereafter disclosed to me, I pledge myself to hold them up to that scorn and abhorrence which they so justly merit, and to “try by the last exertion of my abilities LC to preserve the perishable infamy of their names and make them immortal.” Let it be distinctly understood, that none of the observations

Library of Congress

which have been made respecting Baltimore, that may seem tinged with severity, are designed to be universal. There are many inhabitants of that city whom I highly esteem; it is the birth place or the home of some of my dearest friends.

Before taking leave of you, my fellow-citizens, let me earnestly entreat you, to weigh well the remarks which have been made to you, to carry them with you to all public meetings in your respective counties, to express in the strongest manner, to those whom you may entrust with your confidence, your detestation of the base attempt which has been made by the junto of Baltimore to dictate to the state of Maryland. Let them understand that you expect them, when they next assemble, to put this question at rest *for ever*. I shall now conclude, by again begging you, my-fellow-citizens, that so long as your liberties shall be dear to your hearts, and so long as you shall be able to understand your true interest, you will permit the government to remain where there is nothing to endanger them.

A FRIEND OF THE PEOPLE.

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